

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-03 INR-07 SS-15 SSO-00 INRE-00 IO-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8572

S E C R E T SEOUL 1275

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, KS

SUBJECT: YELLOW SEA INCIDENT BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH,
FEBRUARY 26-27

REF: CINCUNC 270350 FEB 75

1. WE HAVE JUST REVIEWED REPORT BY CINCUNC TO JCS (REFTEL).
REPORT COVERS BASIC FACTS BUT THERE ARE NUMBER OF DETAILS
STILL TO BE FILLED IN BY CINCUNC

2. FROM EMBASSY VIEWPOINT, WE HAVE FOLLOWING PRELIMINARY
COMMENTS OF OUR OWN:

A. YELLOW SEA INCIDENT WAS FIRST IN OUR RECOLLECTION TO
TAKE PLACE IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS AS CLEARLY ACCEPTED
BY BOTH SIDES. IN PAST INCIDENTS, THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN
A CLAIM BY EITHER SIDE THAT INCIDENT ORIGINATED IN INTER-
NATIONAL WATERS.

B. WHILE THIS IS FIRST INCIDENT INVOLVING NORTH KOREAN
FISHING VESSELS SOUTH OF NLL TO OUR RECOLLECTION, THERE
CAN BE A NUMBER OF EXPLANATIONS FOR THIS. ONE POSSIBILITY
IS THAT SMALLER NORTH KOREAN FISHING VESSELS STRAYED SOUTH
AND TWO LARGER ARMED NORTH KOREAN VESSELS WERE SENT SOUTH
TO DIRECT THEM BACK NORTH.

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C. AT NO POINT IN OUR RECORDS OF INCIDENT DID LARGER ARMED
VESSELS HEAD TOWARD SOUTH KOREAN TERRITORY, ALTHOUGH THEY
WERE MOVING SOUTHWARD WHEN SPOTTED AND CONTINUED TO DO SO.
RAMMING INCIDENT TOOK PLACE AFTER NORTH KOREANS

TURNED WESTWARD FROM SOUTH KOREAN TERRITORY TO MOVE
OUT OF AREA WHICH CINUNC DEFINES ROUGHLY AS ADIZ.

D. OUR INITIAL INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT OF NORTH KOREAN
REACTION LEADS US TO TENTATIVE CONCLUSION THAT
NORTH KOREANS WERE REACTING TO WHAT THEY CONSIDERED TO
BE UNIQUE ACTION OF ENGAGING THEIR VESSELS IN INTERNATIONAL
WATERS. THEIR REACTION WAS IN TURN UNIQUE AND
UNCHARACTERISTIC, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO USE OF
AIRCRAFT SOUTH OF NLL AND OVER UNC CONTROLLED NORTHWEST
ISLANDS. NEVERTHELESS, AS REFTEL POINTS OUT, NORTH
KOREAN AIRCRAFT ACTIONS WERE DEFENSIVE IN NATURE.

E. WE ALSO ARE CONCERNED THAT NORTH KOREANS MAY BE
REACTING TO LOSS OF TWO VESSELS IN PREVIOUS MONTHS AND
THAT AS A RESULT OF THIS INCIDENT THEY MAY WISH TO "EVEN
THE SCORE."

F. AT PRESENT TIME OUR PRINCIPAL CONCERN IS CONTINUATION
OF TENSE ATMOSPHERE WHICH COULD LEAD TO FURTHER INCIDENTS
INITIATED BY THE NORTH OR AS RESULT SOUTH KOREAN REACTION
TO NORTH KOREAN ACTIONS. I HAVE SPOKEN WITH GENERAL STILWELL
AND HE ASSURES ME THAT VERY TIGHT CONTROL IS BEING MAINTAINED
OVER ROK FORCES.

G. FINALLY I RECOMMEND URGENT REVIEW OF RULES OF ENGAGEMENT
AS THEY AFFECT ACTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS. AS WE
UNDERSTAND CURRENT RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AS EXPLAINED TO US
BY CINCUNC, OUR SHIPS HAVE RIGHT TO CHALLENGE AND WEEP
TO BOARD SHIPS THAT REFUSE TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES, WHERE
THERE IS NO CLEAR EVIDENCE OF HOSTILE INTENT.
SNEIDER

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